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Saudi crown prince flies to US with AI, defence on agenda

Meeting with President Trump expected today

RIYADH: Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman departed for the United States on Monday to discuss bilateral relations and ways to strengthen them in various fields, as well as to address issues of mutual interest.

The 40-year-old heir to the throne will meet Trump on Tuesday (today), a source close to the government had told *AFP*. The visit also aims at the decades-old Saudi-US cooperation on oil and security while broadening ties in commerce, technology and potentially even nuclear energy.

Prince Mohammed has fostered close ties with Trump and his family over the years — a relationship that was burnished by a lavish welcome and $600 billion in investment pledges when the president visited Saudi Arabia in May.

In the lead up to the prince's trip, Trump has boasted of efforts to convince the kingdom to join the Abraham Accords and cement ties with Israel — a long-sought policy goal of his administration.

Saudi Arabia, however, is unlikely to agree to normalisation at this stage, according to experts, with Prince Mohammed's priority set for firmer US security guarantees after Israeli strikes in September on Qatar, an iron-clad US ally, unnerved the wealthy Gulf region.

A US-Saudi investment forum spotlighting energy and artificial intelligence will take place in the US capital during the prince's three-day visit, the event's website says.

The United States and Saudi Arabia have long had an arrangement for the kingdom to sell oil at favourable prices and for the superpower to provide security in exchange. That equation was shaken by Washington's failure to act when Iran struck oil installations in the kingdom in 2019. Concerns resurfaced in September when Israel struck Doha in an attack it said targeted members of Palestinian resistance group Hamas.

In the aftermath, Trump signed a defence pact with Qatar via executive order. Many analysts, diplomats and regional officials believe the Saudis will get something similar.

Saudi Arabia has sought a defence pact ratified by the US Congress in recent negotiations. But Washington has made that contingent on the kingdom normalising ties with Israel.

Riyadh has in turn linked that to a commitment from Israel's government, the most right-wing in its history, to Palestinian statehood. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who agreed to a Trump-brokered ceasefire with Hamas in Gaza last month after two years of war, on Sunday reaffirmed his staunch opposition to Palestinian independence.

Full defence pact

A Trump executive order on defence similar to the pact with Qatar would fall short of the defence agreement the Saudis have sought.

A Western diplomat based in the Gulf summed up the dynamic: "Trump wants normalisation and Saudi wants a full defence pact, but the circumstances don't allow. In the end, both sides will likely get less than they want. That's diplomacy."

Dennis Ross, a former Middle East negotiator for Democratic and Republican administrations now at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, said he expects an executive order that would call for the US and the Saudis "to immediately consult on what to do in response to the threat" while not committing Washington to actively come to the defence of Riyadh. "That could run the gamut of providing a range of different assistance, replacing arms, deploying defensive missile batteries like THAAD or Patriot, deploying naval forces with a Marine unit - to actively taking part in the combat in an offensive not only defensive manner," he said.

Riyadh has also been pressing for deals in nuclear energy and artificial intelligence under its ambitious Vision 2030 plan to diversify its economy and strengthen its position relative to regional rivals.

Securing approval to acquire advanced computer chips would be critical to the kingdom's plans to become a central node in global AI and to compete with the United Arab Emirates, which in June signed a US multibillion-dollar data centre deal that gave it access to high-end chips.

MBS also wants to strike an agreement with Washington on developing a Saudi civilian nuclear programme, part of his effort to diversify from oil. Such a deal would unlock access to US nuclear technology and security guarantees and help Saudi Arabia level up with the UAE, which has its own programme.

But progress on a US deal has been difficult because the Saudis did not want to agree to a US stipulation that would rule out enriching uranium or reprocessing spent fuel — both potential paths to a bomb.

Ross said he expected an announcement of an agreement on nuclear energy, or at least a statement on progress towards one.—Agencies

45 Indian pilgrims die in road accident near Madina

Bus was carrying many pilgrims from Hyderabad

Dawn Report

RIYADH: A fatal accident involving a bus filled with Indian pilgrims killed at least 45 people near Saudi Arabia's holy city of Madina, Indian police said on Monday, one of the deadliest crashes in the Gulf kingdom in years.

"The tragic bus accident involving Indian pilgrims in Saudi Arabia is deeply distressing," V.C. Sajjanar, police commissioner for the city of Hyderabad, where many of the Indian citizens were reported to have come from, told reporters.

"According to preliminary information, 46 people were travelling in the bus at the time of the incident, and heart-breakingly, only one person survived," he said.

Saudi officials have not provided a toll for the crash.

Earlier on Monday, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi offered his condolences in a post on social media, saying the Indian embassy was working with Saudi officials on the ground. "Deeply saddened by the accident in Madina involving Indian nationals. My thoughts are with the families who have lost their loved ones," the prime minister wrote on X.

Family members and relatives of the deceased pilgrims mourn in India's Hyderabad after the bus crash.—AFP

"I pray for the swift recovery of all those injured. Our Embassy in Riyadh and consulate in Jeddah are providing all possible assistance," he added.

Road crashes were one of the greatest causes of injuries and fatalities in Saudi Arabia, according to a 2023 UN statement, which also said the kingdom had retained a high road fatality rate compared to other high-income countries.

Transporting pilgrims around Saudi Arabia's holy sites has sometimes proven dangerous, particularly during the Haj, when roads can be chaotic with buses creating interminable traffic jams.

Millions of people visit Saudi Arabia for the Umrah pilgrimage, which happens outside of the Haj period.

In March 2023, a bus ferrying pilgrims to the holy city of Makkah burst into flames after a collision on a bridge, killing 20 people and injuring more than two dozen others.

And in October 2019, some 35 foreigners were killed and four others injured when a bus collided with another heavy vehicle near Madina.

The Gulf kingdom is also home to more than two million Indian nationals who have long played a pivotal role in its labour market, helping construct many of the country's mega-projects while sending billions of dollars in remittances back home each year.

Saudi Arabia and India have fostered a close relationship for decades. India's rapidly developing economy relies heavily on petroleum imports, with Saudi Arabia ranked as its third-largest supplier, according to the Indian foreign ministry.

More 'sabre-rattling' from Indian army chief

Pakistan became 'extremely relevant' on global stage after May conflict, says Tarar

NEW DELHI / ISLAMABAD: India continued its sabre-rattling against Pakistan, with the country's army chief comparing the May conflict to a 'trailer' rather than a full-length movie.

"I'd like to say that the movie hasn't even started — only a trailer was shown, and, after the trailer, it was over within 88 hours," General Upendra Dwivedi told a defence conference in New Delhi on Monday.

"So, we're fully prepared for the future, and if Pakistan gives us such an opportunity, we'd like to provide them with a thorough education on how a responsible nation should behave with its neighbours," he told participants of the Chanakya Defence Dialogue.

The Indian army chief's remarks come a week after an explosion near the Red Fort in New Delhi on November 10, leaving 12 people dead in the first such explosion in the Indian capital since 2011.

The conflict between the two countries in May was sparked by an attack in India-held Kashmir, which New Delhi blamed on Pakistan, without evidence. Islamabad strongly denied responsibility and called for a neutral investigation.

New Delhi then launched deadly air strikes in Punjab and Azad Kashmir on May 7. After tit-for-tat strikes on each other's airbases during the four-day escalation, it took American intervention on May 10 for both sides to finally reach a ceasefire.

In his remarks, the Indian army chief said: "Deterrence works when there is political will, trust in military power, and the required military capability. As of now, we have all three."

He also claimed that the situation in occupied Kashmir and Manipur — two restive parts of the country that have witnessed unrest in recent years — had improved.

Although there was no immediate response from the Foreign Office, Information Minister Attaullah Tarar recalled how, after the Pahalgam incident, PM Shehbaz Sharif made an open offer for an impartial and fair investigation, calling it a "turning point".

"We were often blamed for terror acts that were not our fault, and in fact, being the biggest victims of terrorism, there was a propaganda against Pakistan, blaming us for terrorism," he said while speaking at an event in Islamabad.

He contended that Pakistan had become "extremely relevant" on the global stage after its performance during the military conflict against India in May.

"In a very short span of time, we have become extremely relevant in our foreign policy. We have seen in the past two years, and especially after the May war, I think that has redefined who we are," the information minister said.

Referring to India, he said "you can't be a victim and an aggressor at the same time — it's an oxymoron, an inherent contradiction, it's just not possible".—Dawn Report/AFP

Deputy PM reaches Moscow to attend SCO moot

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar reached Moscow, the Russian capital, on Monday to attend the Council of Heads of Government (CHG) meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Galuzin, Deputy Director of State Protocol Aleksander Prusov, Deputy Director of Second Asia Department of Russian Foreign Ministry Alexei Surovtsev along with Pakistan embassy officers received Mr Dar.

The Foreign Office (FO) said he would lead the Pakistani delegation at the summit, being held on Nov 17-18, at the invitation of Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Vladmirovich Mishustin.

"The CHG will be attended by the heads of government of Belarus, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the vice president of Iran, and the foreign ministers of Pakistan and India," an FO statement said.

In addition to SCO member states, the heads of the governments of Mongolia, Bahrain, Egypt, Qatar, Kuwait and Turkmenistan will also be attending the meeting alongside those of regional and international organisations, including the Commonwealth of Independent States, Euro-Asian Economic Union, Collective Security Treaty Organisation and Democratic Socialists of America.

"In his address to the SCO CHG, the deputy prime minister will share Pakistan's perspective on important regional and global issues as well as ways to strengthen the organisation for the benefit of the SCO region," the statement added. —Dawn Report

Israeli settlers' outpost dismantled as Netanyahu slams 'extremists'

Rare action witnessed after Israeli settlers set fire to several properties of Palestinians

JERUSALEM: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed he would deal with the violent "extremists" among Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank, following clashes and another attack on Monday.

Netanyahu called the perpetrators "a group that does not represent" Israeli settlers in the Palestinian territory.

"I call on the law enforcement authorities to deal with the rioters to the fullest extent of the law," he said in a statement.

"I intend to deal with this personally, and convene the relevant ministers as soon as possible to address this serious phenomenon."

Netanyahu said the Israeli security forces would continue to act firmly to maintain order.

His remarks came after Israeli security forces evacuated and demolished an illegal settler outpost in the occupied West Bank on Monday, with the authorities citing "severe incidents of violence".

While all Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank are illegal under international law, outposts are prohibited under Israeli law as well.

Earlier, Israeli settlers burned a house and two vehicles and injured a number of Palestinians in an attack in the occupied West Bank, said *Al Jazeera* while quoting a *Wafa* report.It stated the Israeli settlers assaulted the Palestinians with batons and sharp instruments, resulting in injuries to a number of women. The attack took place under the protection of Israeli forces, who blocked fire engines and ambulances from attending the scene.

A large force was deployed to the Tzour Misgavi outpost in the Gush Etzion area, south of Jerusalem, video footage broadcast by Israeli media showed.

Heavy machinery could be seen preparing to demolish the structures, with one clip showing a bulldozer knocking into the side of a building with people stood on top.

In recent weeks, attacks attributed to Israeli settlers, notably those living in outposts, have multiplied in the occupied West Bank, targeting Palestinians, Israeli and foreign anti-settlement activists and sometimes Israeli soldiers.—Agencies

COP30 talks enter homestretch with UN warning against 'stonewalling'

BELEM: The UN's climate chief urged ministers on Monday to avoid any "stonewalling" and speed up negotiations at COP30 talks in Brazil, with nations divided on key issues with five days left in the gathering.

Ministers have started to arrive to take over negotiations in the second week of talks in the Amazonian city of Belem, with countries debating language over weak climate commitments, insufficient financial pledges and trade barriers.

COP30 is due to end on Friday but the UN's annual climate talks usually spill into overtime as exhausted negotiators struggle to find compromises over how to tackle climate change.

"There is a huge amount of work ahead for ministers and negotiators. I urge you to get to the hardest issues fast," UN climate chief Simon Stiell told the gathering. "I urge you to get to the hardest issues fast." "When these issues get pushed deep into extra time, everybody loses. We absolutely cannot afford to waste time on tactical delays or stonewalling," he said.

Three issues, climate finance, unilateral trade measures, and planned emissions cuts that don't go nearly far enough, were blocking progress after a week of talks.

China, India and other allied countries want COP30 to adopt a decision against unilateral trade barriers — a dig at the European Union's "carbon tax" on imports of carbon-intensive goods such as steel, aluminum and fertilisers.

Meanwhile, island states vulnerable to rising seas, backed by Latin American countries and the EU, believe it is crucial for COP30 to respond to the latest projections showing the world will fail to limit warming to 1.5C and step up their climate commitments. But major emerging countries, from China to Saudi Arabia, do not want a text that implies they are not doing enough to curb climate change.

The third point of contention is a bid by developing countries, especially from Africa, to point the finger at developed nations for falling short on providing financing to help adapt to climate change and cut emissions.

The Brazilian presidency published a memo on Sunday evening summarising these divergent viewpoints and proposing options, some of which are contradictory. "This is the Brazilian presidency setting the table for the end game," Li Shuo, a climate expert at the Asia Society Policy Institute.

Ministers will have to "achieve the very delicate balance between these three pieces," Li said.

Asked if there was any one issue dominating the talks, COP30 President Andre Correa Do Lago replied: "Everything, everything. It's very complicated."—Agencies

Scientists train AI to interpret prehistoric chemical jigsaw

- Researchers from Carnegie Institution for Science find photosynthesis was taking place 800 million years earlier than previously thought
- New technology could 'revolutionise search for extra-terrestrial life'

By Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: Pairing cutting-edge chemistry with artificial intelligence (AI), a multidisciplinary team of scientists on Monday published fresh chemical evidence of Earth's earliest life concealed in 3.3-billion-year-old rocks and molecular evidence that oxygen-producing photosynthesis was occurring over 800 million years earlier than previously documented.

In a ground-breaking study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, scientists from the Carnegie Institution for Science and several partner universities and institutions analysed over 400 samples, including ancient sediments, fossils, modern plants and animals, and even meteorites, to see if life's signature still exists in rocks long after the original biomolecules are gone.

Using high-tech chemical analysis to break down both organic and inorganic materials, Michael L. Wong, Anirudh Prabhu, and colleagues trained AI to recognise chemical 'fingerprints' left behind by life — signals that can still be detected even after billions of years of geological wear and tear.

According to Carnegie Science, the results prove the possibility of distinguishing materials of biological origin (like microbes, plants and animals) from materials of non-living origin (like meteoritic or synthetic carbon) with over 90 per cent accuracy.

These methods teased out chemical patterns unique to biology in rocks as old as 3.3 billion years. Previously, no such traces had been found in rocks older than about 1.7 billion years. The results, therefore, roughly double the window of time in which organic molecules preserved in rocks can reveal useful information about the physiology and evolutionary relationships of their original organisms.

The work also provides molecular evidence that oxygen-producing photosynthesis (the process used by plants, algae and many microorganisms to harness sunlight) was at work at least 2.5 billion years ago. This finding extends the chemical record of photosynthesis preserved in carbon molecules by over 800 million years.

THE 500 million-year-old trilobite Olenoides from Utah has an organic-rich carapace that preserves a record of the original biomolecules.—Courtesy Robert M. Hazen/Carnegie Science

Besides helping find evidence of Earth's earliest life, this work advances a potential way to identify traces of life beyond our planet.

Dr Robert Hazen, senior staff scientist at the Carnegie Institution for Science, said: "Think of it like showing thousands of jigsaw puzzle pieces to a computer and asking whether the original scene was a flower or a meteorite."

"Our results show that ancient life leaves behind more than fossils; it leaves chemical 'echoes.' Using machine learning, we can now reliably interpret these echoes for the first time."

One key insight was that age makes detection harder. Younger samples from the last 500 million years retained strong biotic signals.

The results suggest that machine learning applied to degraded organic matter can help resolve long-standing debates about the evolution of life on Earth in deep time.

This method could also assist in the search for signs of extraterrestrial life. If AI can detect biotic "fingerprints" on Earth that survived billions of years, the same technique might work on Martian rocks or even samples from Jupiter's icy moon Europa.

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